

PRESIDENT
INTERVIEWED

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HUSSEIN

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Interviewed by
American Researcher

Dar al-Ma'mun



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Helms: It is a great honour for me to meet Your Excellency. For two years, I have been reading and studying a good deal about Iraq. Last Summer, I spent six weeks here, and visited many parts of the country. I would like to point out that, of the several Arab countries I have visited, I was most impressed by what Iraq. I think you have now become part of Arab history. I would like to point out that, of the several Arab countries I have visited, I was most impressed by what Iraq. I think you have now become part of Arab history.

Foreword

President Saddam Hussein was interviewed by Miss Christine M. Helms of the Brookings Research Centre on Political and Foreign Affairs, Washington D.C., on August 22, 1982. The interview touched upon various aspects of Iraqi policy. Prominent among such aspects was Iraq's relations with the United States and its views on prospects of their development in the future. Iraq's international policy as well as the various aspects and backgrounds of the Iraq-Iran war figured in the interview. President Hussein dealt with these aspects in detail thus offering a clear picture of Iraq's policies and concerns.

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Helms: It is a great honour for me to meet Your Excellency. For two years, I have been reading and studying a good deal about Iraq. Last Summer, I spent six weeks here, and visited many parts of the country. I would like to point out that, of the several Arab countries I have visited, I was most impressed by what I saw in Iraq. I think you have now become part of Arab history. I would like to thank Your Excellency very much for this great honour you have given me.

Can your Excellency give me an idea about an event in your life which you consider of great importance?

President : Before that I would like to ask you of the places you have visited in Iraq.

Helms : I went to Kirkuk, Arbil, Najaf, Karbala, Himreen Dam area, Tharthar Canal and Khalis agricultural project. Then I went to Qasr Shireen, Muhammara, Basra and Khanaqin. I also spent two days at the marshes with Mr. Safwat.

President: Which part of the marshes?

Helms : Near Amara.

President : Have you seen the peasants at the marshes there?

Helms : Yes I have. I have also taken a canoe in my wanderings, and stayed at the "Mudheef" (Guest House).

President : What attracted your attention most in their way of life?

Helms : In fact it was a wonderful scene, beautiful and very attractive. I was surprised at the feelings towards the government which my host family had. They were very pleased to have electricity and clean water, and very happy to single out these two points. They were not behaving that way because they felt I was accompanied by a government official, or anything like that. They only thought it was a good part of their life which they liked to talk about.

President : Do you know that, for the last thousand years, perhaps since the marshes came into being, the areas which I have personally visited were not visited by a state official, not even a sub-district administrator? Certainly no sub-district

administrator had visited these areas before the Revolution, perhaps since the formation of the State of Iraq, or probably for the last 200 years. There is no document, or personal testimony, to say that any state official, including a sub-district administrator, has ever visited those areas. I think not even a police officer has ever been there. Perhaps some policemen have been to those areas on special chasing assignments.

Helms : When I was here last Summer I watched you on TV while on some of your visits. I know enough Arabic to understand your discussion of land reform, drainage, local projects, and school development. Therefore I made notes on all this, which will be included in my book.

President : I would like us to talk on, and let the questions and answers find their way, so this interview will not take a technically journalistic nature, but assume a wider perspective.

Let me talk to you a bit about the Revolution and about our life. You have to realize that, when I first assumed a new

responsibility in the Leadership in late 1963, the first thing to consider was the life of our people. When I started underground activity from my new position, the basic question before us was: Why did our people lose faith in everything? They lost faith in the ruler, the government employee, the future, everything visible around, doubting whatever could not be seen. We came to a basic belief that this people has a personality of an unusual energy, always trying to express that energy through the right channels, to give its own deep and faithful expression of life. But the rulers always kept the people within narrow confines, where they could not reach a full expression of their personality as desired.

A people thrown into narrow confines is like a large ship made to sailing in a small river. It will certainly fail to sail, not because of an intrinsic reason, but because those in charge did not provide the suitable requirements for the ship to use its capacity in appropriate surroundings.

This was the case of the Iraqi people, almost since the decline of the prosperous

Abbasid era. The people were always severely judged, not by the ruler, but by the outcome, when such outcome was put in the wrong historical perspective and the Iraqi people held responsible for the failure. The fact is that the Iraqi people, for almost a thousand years, were not responsible for any negative result in their life, or in their society as a whole. Personally, I do not think it is fair to hold the Iraqi people responsible for anything of a negative nature in the past thousand years or so.

It is certain that the people's responsibility, regarding the negative and positive aspects in the life of nations, falls within the precincts of philosophic discussion of the previous state of the Iraqi people, in its connection with what that people should do to change that state of affairs and give free rein to its character. Without going into details of this matter, I would like to go back to the basic question we had to face before the Revolution.

We have, therefore, to provide the atmosphere in which all Iraqis may have full chance to use all their energies within

responsible courses with definite objects. Then their high energies will have positive results rather than burst out in harmful and negative directions. Let everyone give full reins to their energies, while we ease at the same time outside pressure on the Iraqi character and energies wherever possible, to have the field wide open before them.

Only then can we objectively say to a person : you have made a mistake, or you have deviated from the right track. Only then can we face the charge that Mr. (X) has deviated because he was not given the right field and chance for the use of all his energies. To complete the picture, we have to commit ourselves to our promise when we tell the Iraqi that we shall follow this policy, or give you these gains, having fully decided that we would do exactly that.

If we should discover, between promise and fulfilment, that we should not carry out that promise, then the promise must be carried out indeed, in order to build a bridge of confidence between the people and

ourselves. We say to the people we do or do not do this or that for this or that reason, acceptable to the people or not. This is because we look at promise and fulfilment within a historical perspective of acceptance, that is, in a perspective of the ultimate visible results, not within a framework of direct and daily details. Therefore, this point has been paramount in the sometimes heated discussion with my companions in the Leadership.

Sometimes we make decisions which we later discover we have to reconsider before putting them into force, or we may find that they have to be cancelled. Then I would refuse and say that though there may be some loss in the implementation of that decision, yet it is a partial loss when seen within the final result, which is gaining the confidence of the Iraqi people. This has been the cornerstone in the profound change in Iraqi personality. It is also one basic reason for later achievements in every field.

Helms : Concerning this very sentence: this faith which makes the Iraqis think they are part of the Iraqi state where they lead

a better material life. How would you describe such advance, and which field is more important?

President : Generally speaking, every Iraqi-whether Muslim or Christian, Kurd or Arab, or of whatever sect or ethnic group, I do not mean the 14 million Iraqis with no exception, but the majority which are the people-feels he has a share in this system of life. In the past they used to deal with governments on the basis of opportunity. The tribal chief used to come closer to the government to secure a gain for his tribe, like having the infirmary in a nearby area, appointing a watchman in the school near his own tribe, or having the highway pass through his area so that his tribesmen can find work to his and their satisfaction.

When there is a sectarian system of government, some narrow minded sectarians would make use of this opportunity, in one way or another. But now, besides the Iraqis' pride in the social and economic change in their life-which they consider a major and central issue-what is more impor-

tant is that everyone feels he is taking part in the construction of a great Iraq with a future that has no limits, where they will enjoy a life of pride and dignity.

You find this is the feeling of the farmer, the student, the Undersecretary, the soldier and the general alike. Everyone, therefore, feels he is standing on the same human line in the historic role of building Iraq, despite their various positions in the state. Everyone has come to feel he is intimately related to this lofty construction, irrespective of his position in the State or the Party.

Helms : When I stayed here, I asked several Iraqis, including some Party ideologists, who in their opinion was the Party ideologist or thinker at present. The answer was unanimously: Saddam Hussein. As an ideologist and leader of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, how do you view your role in the ideological leadership of the Party?

President : I would like to tell you the truth: I did not start my profound, com-

prehensive and responsible thinking until after the Ramadhan Revolution of 1963. That was the beginning, a sense of responsibility after experience, but with no clearly marked role because I was a member of the Party's Farmers Office, and not a member in its Leadership. I did not try political writing except in one Party Internal Communique, in early 1964, when I was in hiding. I issued a communique on behalf of the Party's provisional Regional Command, which did not exist, giving myself the authority, after the Party setback in November 1963, to lead the Party and face the dissenting faction which was posing Marxist ideas.

The Party's National Command was late in appointing a Regional Command in Iraq to lead the Party and face the dissension. Feeling the responsibility towards Party principles, which are there for the sake of the people, I decided to announce the activity of the Party, assuming responsibility on behalf of the Regional Command, which was not in existence. So, I issued a communique on my own responsibility, whereby

I dismissed the majority of the old Comm- and because of their deviation, and charged them with the responsibility for the setback.

This is what happened. Then I pointed out that the course of the Party should be in accordance with the basic precepts from which it had started. Anything else was alien to the Party, and had to be fought, to help the Party follow its proper course. So, my first sense of responsibility, from an advanced responsible position, came after the setback, after the loss of the 1963 Revolution.

Concerning ideology, I did not think I had to be basically concerned with it until 1974. I relied on my companions, especially the non-Iraqis in the National Command, the Syrians and Lebanese, who were more educated, and therefore better equipped in the basic ideology and development of the Party along those lines.

By late 1973 or early 1974, the Revolution began to face problems of ideological nature, which had to be dealt with. Then

I came to believe that such ideological treatment had to be made by the actual leaders of the system directly. This direct leadership would help to tackle every aspect of life which needed attention either in the form of solutions to problems or of anticipating the future with ready-made solutions, which would put action in a proper context that saved the Revolution from surprises, or from proceeding without detailed and comprehensive programmes. In this manner, our thought and experience began to face the need to answer the central ideological questions. When in every day activities one thinks about problems, or tries to see the future, one begins to analyse, consider, and trace every phenomenon to bring everything into focus and not to partial connection. We began to deal with these ideological problems without hesitation. We have always said this is how we see things, and that everything is open to discussion, with nothing to hinder interpretations. We leave it for life and man to decide what is right and what is wrong through acceptance or refusal.

Helms : Can you remember a certain event in your life which was most effective on the way you are now?

President : It is difficult for a person to limit his life to one state only. A farmer's son, who wants to survive, has to face life with his bare skin, and meet the difficulties for the sake of survival. If you pass by the old graveyards near the large villages you will see that children's graves are numerous. Most children could not find medicine or doctors to help their frail health face disease. This is how we grew up to face a life full of difficulties and problems, from birth to the present. But I do not remember having stood helpless before a certain situation, or considered a better state for myself. Whatever things are like, they do not cause me a personal disturbance. Despite difficult life, I never felt a narrow class authority prevented our personality from taking its full scope. Feudalists had no authority in our areas, though they might have acquired it. But the feudalist was a member of our tribe. When anyone was angry with him, he would not hesitate to

chase the feudalism with a cudgel. This is contrary to what was happening in the south and north of Iraq, where feudalism was cruel and enjoyed power and authority.

Helms : Do you think of yourself as a politician? Or rather, do you like your political role, and do you think of it as a duty?

President : Until 1974, I had a personal desire not to be at the helm of power. I even tried at the beginning not to have my name appear among those who are called rulers. I wished to fulfil my party outside the frame of power, until such time when Revolution was settled in its course, then I would be a member of it like others. I never lived through a childhood like that of other people. My adolescence was unlike the ordinary adolescence of others. For as long as I am aware and as long as I remember, I began life realizing that I had an unusual responsibility on my shoulders not a political one at first, naturally, but a responsibility in social life. In the countryside there are predominant traditions which say: Do not laugh too much; do not

talk too much; do not complain of fatigue; do not fear, because it is shameful to be afraid; keep your secret; be generous, because it is shameful to be otherwise. If you have one sheep only you have to slaughter it for your guest. You have to work all the time, because it is shameful to be lazy. You have to get up before sunrise, because it is shameful to remain asleep after daybreak. At night you should not sleep heavily, because it is shameful to have a thief break into your house who finds you asleep. These were the basic values which we found in the countryside, revered by our forefathers. What annoyed me most and made me hate power was the sight of the members of the Regional Command, fighting for power. They disagreed over authority so much that they lost the Ramadhan Revolution and themselves too.

They were responsible for the Party setback in 1963, and I used to watch their power struggle, how they used to bite each other on the way to power. So I developed an aversion to power, that is, I began to loath it. And I tell you even now I hate

power. I could never like it, and have always felt a distance between power and myself. I have never pronounced the word 'government' up to the present. I don't remember having said 'the Iraqi Government' except in the company of foreigners or in letters to foreigners. But in Iraq, I say the 'Leadership,' the 'Revolution Command Council,' the 'Iraqi People' or the 'Iraqi policy.' But I do not say the 'Iraqi Government' because I have got a lasting impression that 'government' is inhuman or inadequately human. The people in the government may not be bad. You may adopt one of them as a friend, in his capacity as an individual in society. When you spend some time with him, you may find him a man of high principles, seriously attached to human issues. But you will find some of them, once settled in a government position, unable to handle a situation in a profoundly human way. Such a man, when he is a simple citizen going to finish real estate formalities for his house or land, or going to deposit some money in the bank, or asking to have a telephone installed in his house, he will try to have that action done

as soon as possible. But when he becomes himself in charge of the real estate department and faces a citizen who would have his business done fast for him, he will not perform his duty as humanely as he should do. Normally, this has many reasons. No previous government has performed a historic role and duty towards our people. The government was either foreign, or in a state of transition towards another stage viewed in the interest of the foreigner. For these reasons, I was until 1974 hoping to see things settle down and take their proper course, so I could be outside the framework of power. But in 1974 and the following years my relations with the people and the Party developed to an extent that leaving the position of power looked as if I did not value responsibility enough or was somewhat unfaithful to the people and the Party and their confidence in us.

So, the most important reason for changing my mind about withdrawing from the position of power was the ordinary citizens and junior Party members, in the first place. I felt that if I left, it meant letting them down. Departure from power seemed

an egoistic personal behaviour, affording rest on a personal level, but keeping one away from one's historic role through which one can serve the people and the Party in matters of principles. The State, is therefore, the inevitable means through which we can serve the people. Up to the present moment, there is no other means through which to serve the people. To avoid the ruler subject formula we say there is a difference between the ruler and the leader. When we accept the role of leader, we do not accept that of ruler.

Helms : You talked about dissent in the Party in the 'sixties'. Can you say now that the Ba'th Party has 'wings' as one would say left wing, moderate or right wing within the Party?

President : Our Party has no wings. It is the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party. There is harmony among Party members on intellectual and psychological levels.

Helms : Decisions are made in the Revolution Command Council. Do you

sit around a table with an agenda and have to have a quorum to take any decision?

President : The Revolution Command Council is a constitutional institution, with powers and procedure assigned by the Constitution. The official meetings are held and presided over by the Chairman or in his absence by the Vice-Chairman. The Council has an agenda, and each item is accompanied by background material circulated to the members before a session is held. Then the Council meets and takes decisions by majority of votes, except in certain areas where there is a supported majority in accordance with the Constitution. But, on the practical level, except on very few occasions, we were concerned not to take decisions by traditional voting, but by consensus. This is not to say that all decisions, even in small details, stem from identical ways of thinking. But when any member in the Revolution Command Council finds that he partially differs from his colleagues in opinion, and that the majority are in agreement on the point under discussion, then the minority does not insist on

having to record an opinion opposite to that of the majority. In this manner, the Council decisions often come out expressing the wish of all members in the Revolution Command Council.

Helms : As a Chairman, do you enjoy a so-called veto right?

President : Constitutionally no. But in practice, my colleagues certainly feel a special weight in my opinion. On various occasions, my colleagues had an opinion different from mine. In that case I do not oppose the majority. The relations among members of the Revolution Command Council are not administrative. They are based on common struggle, and we are concerned to keep those relations humane, intimate and comradely, and we express that in our way of work. In the period between two sessions, the Chairman of the Revolution Command Council may take some decisions on his own responsibility, and within the Constitution. I have signed dozens of decisions which are mostly based on decisions by the Party Congress and

President : I do not really remember declared principles. When the issues concern the higher policy of the state directly, we hold an official meeting of the Council to discuss those issues. When there are urgent issues we call an emergency meeting of the Council and explain the case to the comrades. If those directly concerned with the issues such as the Foreign Minister or other ministers, have basic preliminaries, they attend the meeting and take part in the discussion, though there is no constitutional text demanding their presence. But, as a matter of tradition, when there is an important issue which demands the presence of the ministers concerned, particularly the Foreign Minister before he became a member of the Party's Regional Command, then they attend the meetings of the Revolution Command Council and take part in discussions.

Helms : I have noticed, for instance, that before Dr. Sa'doun Hammadi became a member in the Regional Command, Mr. Tariq Aziz had a research bureau in the Revolution Command Council. In cases like these does the research bureau of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party make political

suggestions, which are later submitted to the Minister? What happens to a person who is a Minister in the government but not a Command member in the Party? How can he submit an opinion or carry out this policy? And what about the relations between Party bureaus and the ministers?

President : We have a Cabinet which has authorities and agenda to follow on the affairs of the state, including political affairs. The Chairman of the Revolution Command Council, who is at the same time the Prime Minister may find that a certain issue is the concern of the Revolution Command Council and not the Cabinet or that it is preferable that the latter should take final action on that issue. He may see that the Revolution Command Council should discuss the issue, then the ministers attend the discussion. The other point which you mentioned is in order: Dr. Sa'doun Hammadi was actually asked to attend the discussions of the Revolution Command Council.

Helms : Do you remember a case on which you took a decision by voting at the Revolution Command Council?

President : I do not really remember. The decisions taken by vote mostly assumed an aspect of friendly jokes, if one can put it that way. Normally in the decisions taken by vote, I do not remember having raised my hand with the voters. I used to let my companions decide the majority for themselves, without preferring one vote to the other, although the Constitution provides that when a decision gets equal votes, then the majority is with the side supported by the Chairman.

Helms : Now in the Iraq-Iran war, was the decision taken in that manner?

President : In decisions of special importance we always asked after discussions whether anybody had any objection to the decision. But in the case of conflict between us and Iran, all the measures and basic decisions were taken by a joint meeting of Party Command and the Revolution Command Council.

Helms : Does the Party Command then mean the National Command and the Revolution Command Council come later?

President : The supreme Party Leadership in the Arab Homeland is the National Command. The Party Leadership in Iraq is the Regional Command. Some of the basic issues of the war were decided in a joint session of the Revolution Command Council, the National Command of the Party, and the Regional Command of the Party in Iraq.

Helms : Is it possible to know the number of the members of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party at present?

President : This has not been a question for the media. If you ask any member in the Command, he will not be able to give you a definite answer. But I can telephone to the Regional Secretariat for the number if we find interest in letting public opinion know the number of party members. But we can say that those connected with the Party, as members or otherwise, count more than a million now.

Helms : But you do not know who the members are?

President : I do not have the number, but I can find out without telling you.

Helms : Can I have some information on the Party?

President : There are three stages in the Party: a 'sympathizer' who though called symathizer, is still connected with the Party and has commitments; a 'supporter,' who is higher in class and is given harder duties; the third stage is that of the full member. For a person to be a full member of the Party, he has to go through two stages: that of a candidate and that of a trainee. After making the Party oath and completing his training, a trainee requires a report from his superior, indicating no misdeed in his behaviour and thinking as a Ba'thist before he achieves full membership in the Party. A member can nominate himself for leadership levels and can take part in elections. The trainee, can participate in election but cannot nominate himself to leadership levels. These are the three cycles in the Party which embrace more than a million people. The

full members are smaller in number than 'sympathizers' and 'supporters.' The largest group is that of 'sympathizers.'

Helms : What do you mean by 'trainee'?

President : We mean the Iraqi or the Arab who has become an organized Ba'thist, with full commitments like those of the full members in the Party, except certain rights like the right to nominate for leadership positions. These are denoted by time of membership and level of responsibilities entrusted to the Party member which determine the right to such nomination.

Helms : Does that apply for instance, to Mr. Abdul Wahab Mahmoud, the Minister of Irrigation?

President : He is a full member in the Party. But sometimes, within their sectors, some ministers may attend regular Party meetings of a level higher than their Party grade. They take part in discussions but not in decision making.

Helms : Why was there a drop in the number of Revolution Command Council members?

President : There was an increase on one hand and a drop on the other in the number of the members of the Revolution Command Council. The decision taken by the Command, before announcing the results of the election conference, was that new Command members do not automatically join the Revolution Command Council which keeps the same number of members. The new Regional Command Members did not, therefore, become members in the Revolution Command Council. This decision was taken pending suitable time to discuss the better constitutional version in the constitutional build-up of the state. Mr. Taha Muhiddin Ma'rouf, the Vice-President of the Republic, was added to the Revolution Command Council, though he was not previously a member in the Council. Thus the number was increased in one aspect and decreased in another. The decision was not basically a desire to reduce membership, but as it has already been pointed out, to

afford the Command a chance to study the constitutional build-up of the state.

Helms : I have learned that there have been various attempts on your life. Do you have a comment on that?

President : You should inevitably expect attempts of this sort. I do not think a person who takes an unusual part in development could be far away from evil intentions which run contrary to the progress of the country. I answer you as a friend to Iraq and irrespective of rumours. I say that it would be illogical to imagine that there is no force which aims at Saddam Hussein personally. If one says there is no such force, it would mean that Saddam Hussein has no role of special weight in the new Iraqi construction, or that the new construction in Iraq does not stir the jealousy or fear of certain wicked forces. But, if one day a count is made of the number of attempts made by enemies against us, you will find that not one of those attempts was free of some alien support.

Helms : I also learned from Mr, Taha Yassin Ramadhan that three army genera's were executed.

President : You know that in a long war there are failures as well as triumphs. In any great course of action, whether fighting for the country or building it up, there are men who bear responsibility incessantly. Their fidelity is of the same standard as their historical vision of the entire action. They are extraordinarily brave and capable men. Some of them may show a weakness in the course of their duty: a weakness towards the enemy or towards certain temptations. Weakness and major failures in the army, by a man in a leading position before the enemy in wartime, are dealt with under military laws in the entire world by certain measures, some of which may lead to death. The same holds true for the Iraqi law which we have inherited, and which is still in force in the armed forces. The law was put in force in certain cases which emerged during the war, including the responsibility of some commanders in the battle of Karun West. Some

of them were executed. They were two generals and one commander.

Helms : The Iraqi sociologist Ali Al-Wardi says that the Iraqi personality is a double personality. On the one hand the Iraqi may be severe, decisive and strong, but then he may be loving, temperamental and generous. Do you agree with this opinion? How do you justify this? Does this have historical reasons?

President : Double personality is different from what you have described. A double personality means that the same personality bears two different ones: at certain times it appears human and loves good deeds, while at other times, without a basic change of situation, it appears hateful of life, good and humanity. This could take the form of a social disease affecting any society, in accordance, of course, with its historical conditions. You may find those affected by this disease in the Iraqi society more or less in number than those in the French or Libyan society, for instance, more or less than what you find

in the Greek society. The case is connected with historical development and the conditions of society. There is no doubt that political development, together with the aspects connected with social, economic, and political life, including the question of democracy and its circumstances, has an influence on the number of people affected by this disease. But the example you just referred to, if mentioned by Al-Wardi, is not a case of disease. You may even find the leader himself more delicate than a vial of perfume or a rose. But you may also find him sharper than a sword's edge. In all these cases he is not of a double personality. Take me for instance: as a human being I suffer when I sign a sentence of death on the military commanders you have mentioned, that is on the human and personal levels. But acting from a position of responsibility, I find their behaviour deserving such punishment, which I wish it did not take place. So you find me and every official in the State and the Party: we feel as we should on the human level, yet we are strong and balanced enough to behave as officials towards responsibility

from a position of strength. And this is the case of all Iraqis: soft to the limit, human to the limit, and also sharp to the limit in case of need. This is a quality in the Iraqi people that I like. What is more important is another quality in the Iraqi people. They are not satisfied with anything. My companions used to be displeased with this quality of rejection and dissatisfaction in the Iraqi personality. But I used to like it, and I still do. I used to say to my companions that I am pleased with the Iraqis over this point, because a man who does not move fast will have his heels stepped on, then his back, then he is crossed over. The man who leads the Iraqis must be of a quick and nimble pace so the others will not step on his heels, then his back, then step on his head and pass him over. A great people is not supposed to be satisfied with little and forget much. Our people deals with two states at the same time: it is proud of what it has in hand now, but it does not accept it as a final state of affairs: it looks eagerly ahead and works hard to get there. I do not consider these examples an indication

of a double personality but rather of a healthy state in the Iraqi people. At the same time, I say that the hard times which the Iraqi people suffered before the Revolution, including the absence of educators and the people's failure to exercise their national and patriotic role directly, caused the Iraqi personality to show some negative qualities which should be abandoned. The Revolution has dealt with most of them. There is a quality in the Iraqi personality, which I myself used to have, but is now modified by virtue of my official position, namely, that the Iraqi often confides in others absolutely. When he likes someone he could give him everything. But when he discovers later that his confidence has been misplaced, he suffers a severe reaction towards the person with whom he had dealt vested with absolute confidence and great generosity. This is a quality you will find in the Iraqis. Naturally, when this is found in individuals, its harm could be limited. But when it is found in the leaders, and in the latter part of the twentieth century, it could have dire consequences. I have trimmed part of what is harmful of this quality in my own char-

acter, but I have not abandoned its basic spirit. I have enough knowledge of the Iraqi personality. I do not exert myself in reading books as much as I do in probing the phenomena of behaviour, especially that of simple people. I try to see how the farmer behaves, for instance, and how he thinks, going deep into these phenomena to trace them back to their central causes. I usually know enough about the Iraqi personality to make me very proud of it. Basically always ask myself, as an Iraqi citizen, whether I should accept or refuse this or that matter. When I find a clear answer, whether I should refuse or accept the matter in hand, I find it of a great help in taking certain decisions. Even in the discussions of the Command, I often request my companions to ask themselves, and we all ask ourselves as citizens, whether we should accept or refuse the decisions which are to be made, so the answer would help us take more correct decisions. It is natural that we should realize what is correct from a position of responsibility and in the light of its requirements, when we exercise our duties in all occasions.

Helms : I know that a number of people have asked you about the Iraq-Iran war. Concerning the basic and important factors of the war, can you say something about the effect of that war? In a wider perspective, do you view it as a conflict between Arab nationalism and Islamic extremism? Personally, I find the Iraq-Iran war a major turning-point in the Middle East history.

In the home affairs of many Arab countries the war will also have an effect on the internal policy to be followed. What do you think of this point?

President : The main point about the answer is that it should present such facts and logic to make the other party, especially when the question comes from a friend, believe that the answer is based on facts and logic. On the Iranian side, the times and circumstances after the start of the war brought out facts which cast enough light on the correct answer as to why in the Iranian policy, the war took place. Those facts also answer or illuminate the answer as to who started the war: Iraq

or Iran? Briefly, Khomeini assumed power in Iran less than two years before the war. I believe that the entire world agrees that Khomeini has not built up Iran, but it does agree that we have built up Iraq in a new manner. In September 1980 we were in a peak of activity in building up Iraq in various fields. We laid out an ambitious plan for development and overcoming handicaps and bottlenecks. Our plan was well known to Zionism first and to all forces antagonistic to the Arabs and new Iraq. Therefore, what we wanted to do in the way of building up was previously visible by the enemies. The five-year plan was made public and not kept secret. And our effort to build up Iraq and raise its standard and responsibilities had become well-known.

Helms : Yes, I think that the Israelis fear Iraq more than any other Arab country.

President : I'll tell you why they fear Iraq, and whether their fear stems from military, technical or cultural reasons. Some people say that a new comer to power may make strategic mistakes more than

those who are more experienced in power, especially the officials. Here we may ask whether Iran has any ambitions in Iraq. Does the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party seek expansionism into Iran? We leave the answer to you and all the others. Then we ask the question: Has Khomeini built up Iran? Has he presented a programme to build Iran similar to the Iraqi programme of construction? Does Khomeini want his party to expand and cover Iraq? The answers to these questions show who wants to expand at whose expense. That is acceptable logic, isn't it?

As to the facts, I ask whether we have ever announced before or during the war, through any official person, that we have ambitions in Iran? If we have done so, through any official in the state or Party, then this would indicate ambitions. The answer to this question is in the negative.

Then we ask a similar question: Have the Iranians, from major official positions, declared before and during the war that they have ambitions in Iraq, the Gulf states,

the Arab Peninsula and the entire Islamic states? The answer is yes. And this is supported by documents from their broadcasts, papers, and actual practice. It follows then that Iran started the war to carry out Iranian designs. We had to fight in defence of our country. Defence here does not have the mere sense of defence, but it embraces the human sense of protecting the new process of civilization in Iraq and even outside Iraq. And we have done so. We look at war as an evil which has to be avoided wherever it is possible to find another way of expressing the national role and sovereignty, and the right of people to security and life. But when war becomes the only way to defend our country against a war, not only declared, but an actual war against us already in existence in word and deed, taking the form of bombarding townships, with a view to destroying them, penetrating through Iraqi territories since September 4, 1980, then war becomes the inevitable option. It becomes a civilizational and healthy choice for the Iraqi people to fight in order to avoid retrogression and the violation of its character, as the case

used to be. This war has taught the Iraqi greater precision and given them an image of friend and foe. It has taught them what preparation and work the new life demands. It has taught them an unusual patience and strengthened their self-reliance. All this will have positive effect on the Iraqi personality.

To go back to the question of Israel. Israel attacked us and destroyed the peaceful Tammuz nuclear reactor while we were busy fighting Iran, destroying thereby a scientific link of research, although Iraq is a signatory of the nuclear arms non-proliferation treaty, and has been very widely active, for a long time, to keep the Middle East free from nuclear arms. This is what Israel did, and Iran did a similar act, a few weeks ago, when it blew up the Ministry of Planning. The two acts stem from the same incentive, which aims at the new cultural and scientific construction in Iraq, at the proper path of development. This is the objective. So, when you see our insistence on construction in Iraq, under war conditions, and in a manner unprecedented in

any country in the world, it is because we very well know, as all Iraqis do, the reasons of the war against Iraq, and the motives of the wicked forces which planned it. They aim at new Iraq, at development, at preventing Iraq from overcoming impediments.

Therefore, self-defence does not only demand fighting heroically in the front lines but building Iraq equally heroically and thoughtfully. Israel then does not fear Iraq from the technical security point of view, because Iraq is neither an expansionist nor an aggressive country. Israel is afraid of the upsurge of civilization in Iraq, knowing that this will directly or indirectly check Israel's expansionism at the expense of the Arabs. The most important point in expansionism is not gaining more territory from the Arabs, but using or turning the Arabs into a means of marketing Israeli commodities, turning Arab raw materials into Israeli developed industry, depriving the Arabs of their power to make an independent decision. Israel then wants to raise a new structure and lay down a new plan at the expense of the Arabs. It believes that the new

cultural structure of Iraq will prevent the fulfilment of its plans. Therefore, while Iraq faces Iran, Israel stabs it in the back, and despite the fact that the Ministry of Planning has no room of operations, we find Iran attempting to blow it up through Iranian agents coordinating with Syrian intelligence.

Helms : What is your opinion of the American role in Lebanon, and how do you view the variables on the Lebanese arena?

President : Irrespective of the background of the Lebanese situation, the recent outcome, that is the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, is a sum total of joint American and Israeli efforts, in one way or another.

Helms : How do you view the Soviet assistance to Iraq? How does the Soviet Union view the US attitude towards the Iraq-Iran war in this respect? Can Iraq obtain arms?

President : Let us look at the meaning of assistance first. Does the word mean

assistance within a humane framework in development and other fields, or does it have an international sense, that is, the meeting of strategies and interests? Great powers look at each other in one way or another, and the curtain that separates them is rather transparent. When France, for instance, finds that its international enemy X is working against Y, France would give special facilities to Y without intending to extend assistance, but in the sense of preventing the adversary from achieving its strategy. This happens with the great powers. But, our diplomatic relations are severed with the US, and we have no significant political relations, or relations in the field of armament and military supplies with the US. But we have good diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and our relations in the field of armament and military supplies with the Soviet Union have a long history. But Americans and Soviets have told us that they do not want the war, have not caused it, they want to stop it, and they are not against us. The Soviets say to us that they are our friends and that they want to keep that friendship.

Helms : Do you envisage a resumption of diplomatic relations with the US one day in the future?

President : Normal dealing calls for resumption of relations. There should not emerge a thought in Iraq that relations with the US are unimportant, and that Iraq could do without these relations in all cases and all times. And I also say confidently that the US will one day realize that Iraq is of such importance that the US cannot afford to ignore it or overlook its role. The US will find that having normal relations with Iraq, based on equality and non-interference in domestic affairs, is a vital question. On this basis, when we find that it is in our national interest to establish normal relations with the US, we shall not hesitate to do so. And we have said this directly to the Americans.

Helms : Have the Americans implied to you that they want to resume relations?

President : Obviously the Americans have been for a long time, directly or indirectly, expressing a desire to resume rela-

tions. But we answer in the same logic that the normal steady thing to do is to have diplomatic and other relations with you; the absence of such relations is a situation connected with its own conditions and causes; when our national interest demands a resumption of relations, we will resume them. We've said that we have no objection to have relations on any political level whenever either party finds that necessary, though relations are severed between our two countries. We have raised the level of dealing with the US representative in Iraq, so our Foreign Ministry receives him as an Ambassador, on the same level as others, for protocol purposes. We also permitted them to instal direct communications equipment between the US and their representative in Iraq.

Helms : Do you believe that the measure taken by Syria to stop the flow of Iraqi oil was under pressure from the Soviet Union or are there other reasons? It seems to me that some reasons lie in the fact that you personally, Mr. Saddam Hussein, have in the last ten years, played a balanced,

flexible or very moderate role in both domestic and foreign policies of Iraq. There is also the pressure on the non-aligned movement, and what you talked about of Israel's fear concerning Iraq and its economic and social development to make Iraq itself the leader, of the type the Soviets find disturbing. You have also sought independence and freedom for your country away from any foreign force or pressure.

President : Up to the moment I have not felt that any of the super powers like independent states or look at them in the same manner as they look at those states which move in the super power orbits. At the same time, I know by looking into international policy that major powers which fail to annex or directly influence this government or that, would at least see that such governments do not go so far as to serve their opponents' strategy. To the extent that the Soviets find Iraqi policy does not in the end serve their opponents' strategy, meet or deviate from some aspects of their own strategy, they will decide their own policy, as much as the US will decide

their own policy from a different point of view. But, generally speaking, we have enough examples to let us say that on many occasions concerning the Arabs, especially in the Arab conflict with Israel, the Soviets have sided with the Arabs, while the US took the side of Israel. We have to take this into practical considerations, together with the causes and incentives connected with this strategy or that.

Helms : Do you think Europe will play an increasingly important part?

President : We hope that Europe will play such a part, and we think it will do so. We also think that many independent European states, that is independent in making decisions without outside influence from super powers, should play such an important part. This is one of the reasons behind our good relations with France.

Helms : I know you are very busy and tired. But I wish I could ask one question. So far as I know, there are many military experts in the West who say, depending on

satellite pictures, that the Iraqi army is now conducting operations that are so very good as to surprise those experts. They expressed their surprise by saying they thought they were dealing with a different Iraqi army. They also felt that in the recent battles each of the military commanders had enough intelligence as not to use his reserve force so that the main Iranian forces could not move, or that their movement was one of no use. Those experts say that the Iraqi army is now making excellent and developing maneuvers. Do you think these observations are correct? If so, how do you explain this new state? Are there new commanders on the battle front? Or are there new methods in making decisions? What is new in this change? Or are the equipment different?

President : Let me give you some background to the subject. When Iran launched an aggression against our lands and townships between September 4 and 22, 1980, Iraq met the aggression with military action reaching its peak when Iranian concentrations had peaked on September 22 upto

28 of that year. In that period the majority of Iranian military concentrations on and within Iraqi borders were destroyed, and the Iranian army retreated under Iraqi strikes. We chased the Iranian army to a certain depth inside Iranian territory, in order to protect our townships making use of the Iranian territory held by the Iraqi army. As you know, the distance between the Iraqi borders and certain inland townships and vital axes is rather limited.

We used to give the simple soldier and the commanders some complex instructions. We used to tell them, for instance, that their presence beyond the borders was necessary for the defence of an Iraqi position behind them. These are rather wearying, complicated and indirect instructions which demand an unusual awareness. But our people and army were aware of that. However, we do not claim that, with a long war that goes on for years, we can still say to the Iraqi soldier: "When you shed your blood on this land you have to remember it is Iranian territory, and that you are here not to keep this land but to defend

your country. When the Iranians accept to leave you alone to choose your way of life, declaring that they will refrain from aggression against you, then you shall hand this land over to its owners, leaving your blood on it."

We cannot say that the Iraqi fighter's spirit of performance and sacrifice when on Iranian territory will be the same as when he stands on his own land.

We are always anxious to appear as we are in reality. We have no desire for Iranian territory, nor do we have any bad intentions. When we found public opinion, and the Iranian peoples, asking why the Iraqi forces were on Iranian territory and, out of respect to public opinion, and as an expression of our peaceful policy, having destroyed the basic weight of the Iranian forces which could penetrate in depth to carry out expansionist designs, we made our decision to fight on the borders.

This has given us shorter logistic lines and helped in maintenance and maneuvers.

It has also made the danger appear directly and with exact details, through Iranian persistence in continuing the war, declaring expansionist intentions at the expense of Iraq, and supporting those intentions by military action.

If some Iraqis, for any reason, have forgotten the background of Iranian aggression against Iraq two years ago, they cannot forget the daily Iranian conduct of declaring covetous designs on Iraq. The soldier used to stand on non-Iraqi soil, and we used to tell him that he was in territory not his own, his presence being temporary, and that western and other media, including Iranian, reiterated that Iran had no ambitions in Iraq, and that all Iran wanted was that the Iraqi army should leave Iranian territory. These conditions had a negative effect on the performance of the Iraqi soldier as the war went on. But when the Iraqi army pulled back to the borders and Iranian aggression continued, intentions were confirmed once more, and readiness to defend the country was boosted.

It is axiomatic to say that every battle with Iran throughout these two years, whether it was won or lost, was subjected to profound scrutiny, in order to make calculations for a future battle where the Iraqi army could perform better. This was extensively done after the Karun West battles, including the battle of Muhammara. Another point is the choice of a better command. This is a constant policy with us, on political, military and ministerial levels. If a person of lower grade is more efficient, he supercedes the one ahead of him in gradation and occupies a forward position.

Helms : I would like to extend my gratitude to all the Iraqi people has shown me throughout my stay here. I know that in the past many visitors of Iraq did not try to understand certain points about the Iraqi people and society in their proper perspective, or to know enough about the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party. Even though I am an American, I have been treated as a friend throughout my stay in Iraq. I appreciate all you have done for me, helping me to go around in your country, to

meet with leaders, and especially the chance to meet with Your Excellency. I hope that the future will be on your side.

President : Thank you for your good wishes. I feel that your wishes are sincere. God willing, we shall meet once more, to see you in good health as you are now. What is more important is that you should be satisfied with what you are doing now. Iraq is always a friendly country and you can always come as a guest and go around freely. You are welcome.

Helms : They have told me that whoever drinks of the Tigris water would inevitable return to it. God willing, I shall come back, because I drank a lot of the Tigris water.

President : You sound emotional, that is, you have a human sentiment based on the love of doing good, which is what we have too. The Iraqi people is emotional, that is, it is human in outlook on life and peoples. I believe this is the secret of your love for Iraq.

Helms : Thanks, Your Excellency.

حديث السيد الرئيس القائد صدام حسين
الى الكاتبة الامريكية كريستين موسس هليمز
الباحثة في معهد بروكينز للدراسات السياسية
والشؤون الخارجية في واشنطن في ٢٢ آب / ١٩٨٢

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